

THE HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC DEAF ASSOCIATION

The Catholic Deaf Association was established in 1970. Before 1970 there were already Services for Deaf people in a few of the Dioceses in England and in Ireland. However, these Services relied on the goodness and charity of certain people who offered their time freely. It was Canon William Hayward who began the seminal development of diocesan Service to Deaf people.

To find out more about the life and work of Canon Hayward and St. Joseph's Mission to Deaf people, see '*Canon William Hayward.*'

This brief story of his life will show how after many years his work led to the setting up and development of the Catholic Deaf Association as we know it today.

The First Conference, Hopwood Hall, 1969

In 1963 Fr Diarmuid O'Farrell attended the Convention of the International Catholic Deaf Association in Buffalo, USA. His experience at that Convention convinced him of the value of two things: that Chaplains to Deaf people and others involved in the Pastoral Care of Deaf people should be professionally competent in the work; and that Chaplains should meet regularly for mutual support.

Fr O'Farrell returned from America in September and telephoned Fr. Charles Hollywood to discuss his ideas with him. Eventually they decided that the most suitable place for a chaplains' meeting would be St. John's School, Boston. A meeting was arranged and Canon J. J. Kelly was the chairman who became the first President of the Catholic Deaf Association. Chaplains came from London, Glasgow, Manchester and Birmingham. Further meetings took place and they began to gain an overall picture of the spiritual needs of Deaf people in Britain. They thought that other people involved in the Pastoral Care of deaf people should also become professionally qualified. Sr Catherine Hegarty, Sr Anthony McRory and Fr. O'Farrell completed the three year course of the Deaf Welfare Examination Board. Fr Hollywood completed the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW) and took the Deaf Welfare Examination Board's diploma course. Later, others followed.

The next step in establishing the Association took place in rather unusual circumstances. During the RNID Conference in Edinburgh in 1968 a small group of people attending the Conference met in the lounge bar of an Edinburgh Hotel to discuss the way forward for Catholic Deaf people. The small group included Fr. Hollywood, Fr. Cowan, Sr. Catherine Hegarty and Fr. O'Farrell. At the end of the discussion, they reached the conclusion that they should have their own Conference. They felt that because the people involved in the Pastoral Care of Deaf people at that time were all working in different dioceses, they were isolated from the others and hence did not receive support. They chose Hopwood Hall near Manchester as the venue for the Conference, and invited all the people that they knew were working with Deaf adults and children in the United Kingdom and Ireland. The first Conference was a great success. It began on Friday and finished on Sunday and over 100 people attended. The Eucharist became the central part of the Conference. After the Conference, a full report of what had happened was sent to every bishop in England and Wales.

The one difference between the first Conference in 1969 and Conferences in other years was the absence of Deaf people. There were no Deaf people at that first Conference, this was because the core group who planned the first Conference were not sure of the outcome or success of the Conference. However, at the second Conference in 1970, four Deaf people were present; they were Gerry Brosnan and Kathleen (Cokie) O'Connell from London, Colin Dyer from Cambridge, and James Aitcheson from Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Every year, more and more Deaf people come to the

Conference, and many became directly involved in the planning, preparation and involvement at the Conferences. The first Deaf person to give a paper at the Conference was Jerry Hanifin.

Setting up the Catholic Deaf Association, 1970

Between 1969 and 1970 a lot of work was done to draw up a Constitution for the new Association. They drew up the Constitution and sent a copy to the bishops of England, Ireland, Scotland asking them to approve it. They did, and the Association was given the official title of *The Association for the Catholic Deaf of Great Britain and Ireland*. The Constitution was presented to the delegates at the Conference in 1970 and it was accepted.

The development of the Catholic Deaf Association

There were several Deaf Clubs that Canon Hayward had established in various places with help from the SVP (St Vincent de Paul Society). There were Services for Deaf people in Newcastle, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and London. St John's School, Boston Spa at the time of its centenary (1975), had about 145 Catholic children in the school; it was only 16% of the 900 Catholic Deaf children in England and Wales.

They decided it was important that a service was set up in each diocese rather than in those main towns. Certain people began doing missions and travelled around the country. But there were problems, the dioceses didn't know who they were or what they were trying to do; they needed a mandate. Eventually, they organised a meeting at St. John's School, Boston Spa, and met with three bishops: Bishop Holland from Salford diocese; Bishop Emery from Portsmouth diocese; and Bishop Wheeler from Leeds diocese. They explained the situation and gave them the Lucas Report for them to present to all the other bishops at the following Bishops' Conference meeting. Over the years, various dioceses were visited and a service was set up in all those dioceses: Lancaster, Brentwood, Arundel & Brighton, Dundee, Clifton, Northampton, East Anglia, Plymouth, Cardiff, Middlesbrough, Nottingham, etc. Eucharistic communities formed and developed; people were encouraged to learn sign language and become Deaf Aware; liturgical services were celebrated in sign language and Deaf people encouraged to learn something about their faith, many of them for the first time ever; thus the seeds were sown.